

21 MARCH 1976

The Schorr Case: Look to Motives — and Wonder

STAT By I. F. Stone

One of the first steps in solving a crime is to determine who benefited by it. The chief beneficiaries in the leak of the Pike Committee report on intelligence were the intelligence agencies themselves. The report turned up on the CBS evening news Sunday, Jan. 25, and in the first editions that same evening of the *New York Times* for Monday, Jan. 26. When the House of Representatives met in Washington at noon next day, the minority on the Pike Committee launched the attack which led three days later to the vote against release of the report.

Logic, probabilities, and the circumstantial are not proof. Folly can never be excluded. But an examination of the strange circumstances in which the report was suppressed may put newspapermen on their guard and show the public what we are all up against in dealing with secret agencies.

The Pike Committee voted 9-4 on the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 23, to release its report. Everything was ready for publication after months of hard work and agonizing hassles with the intelligence agencies and the executive branch. The majority of the committee and the staff were triumphant. The last hurdles to publication seemed to have been safely cleared.

Yet that very weekend someone leaked a copy of the report to the *New York Times* and to Daniel Schorr of CBS, giving the intelligence agencies their chance to discredit the committee and block release of the report.

This leak was not, repeat not, a leak to thwart censorship. Under the rules of the House and the resolution establishing its Select Committee on Intelligence (the Pike Committee), that 9-4 vote on Friday afternoon, Jan. 23, was all that was needed to release the report. The committee did not have to go to the Rules Committee for permission, nor did it need a vote of the House to make the report public. The report would have been released automatically as soon as copies came back from the printer. It was the leak that did the committee in.

At the time of the leak, the *Times* and CBS were not giving the public information that would otherwise have been suppressed. They were merely getting the report in advance of their competitors. At that point, their news stories were a beat, not a public service. Indeed, as soon became clear, it was a public disservice to jump the gun by a few days on official release of the report at the cost of giving its enemies — and the enemies of the press — just the opportunity they were looking for.

The leak fit beautifully with a well-synchronized attack by the enemies of the report. On Monday morning, Jan. 26, Daniel Schorr showed his copy of the Pike report on the CBS morning news and the *Times* arrived in Washington with extensive stories on what the report contained. This coincided — whether by accident or design — with plans which seem to have been already made for an onslaught that very day on the floor of the House.

The leaks to the *Times* and CBS were brought up over and over again by Congressman McClory of Illinois, the ranking Republican on the Pike Committee, and by his supporters. The final speaker, the Republican minority leader, Rhodes of Arizona, summed it all up by saying that the executive branch "charged with our national security" could not be expected "to confide in a Congress that is a direct conduit to the public press and rushes to the media to divulge every particle of information it receives." In a phrase worthy of the best on Madison Avenue, Rhodes said the public's right to know did not give Congress "the right to blab." Even soap has never been sold more skillfully.

This is the theme song of the counterattack orchestrated by the intelligence agencies — the new-speak of the CIA and FBI. Congressional control is to be stigmatized as a "blabbermouth" operation. Attention is to be focused not on the abuses of secret government but on those who criticize and expose them. And if there isn't enough "blabbing" from Congress we may expect the intelligence agencies to do the blabbing themselves and blame it on Congress and the press.

The government itself has always been the foremost leaker. The chief value of the classification system is the wide leeway it gives the government for manipulating the public mind by selective declassification. But this is only one of its many uses.

One way to undercut a congressional investigation is to beat it to the punch by leaking part of the story in advance. It makes the later official revelation sound like old-hat news. It leaves the congressional report, when and if it comes, to be greeted by "ho hum, so what's new?"

A lot of the "leaks," as many newspapermen know, have come from the executive branch and the intelligence agencies themselves. One of the biggest "leaks," which hurt the Pike Committee last November, was the leak to Schorr at CBS and to the *Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor* of the tragic story of how the CIA sold the poor Kurds down the river, first giving them secret support against Iraq and then cutting it off when that suited the Shah of Iran's power politics. Pike Committee sources claim that there were hitherto unknown details in the *New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor* reports of the Kurd story which were new even to its own investigators, details which led them to suspect that the leaks must have come from an intelligence agency.

Schorr broke the Kurdish story on CBS news on the Saturday night before it appeared in the *Times* and the *Monitor*. Mitchell Rogovin, special counsel to the CIA, phoned a Pike Committee staff official that Saturday morning and asked him to stop Schorr from telling the story on TV that night. The Pike Committee official, who had not been aware that the Kurdish story had leaked, asked himself whether that telephone call was a cute way to divert suspicion from the CIA as the source. That is the kind of question naturally bred by the CIA's capacity for murky and labyrinthine manipulations. The CIA was aware that nothing had so angered the Pike Committee as the Kurdish tragedy — this was a subject on which there was no minority — and some Pike Committee members believe that the intelligence agencies leaked it in advance to defuse the coming committee report.

The Kurdish story leaked the very weekend in November that CIA Director William Colby was fired by